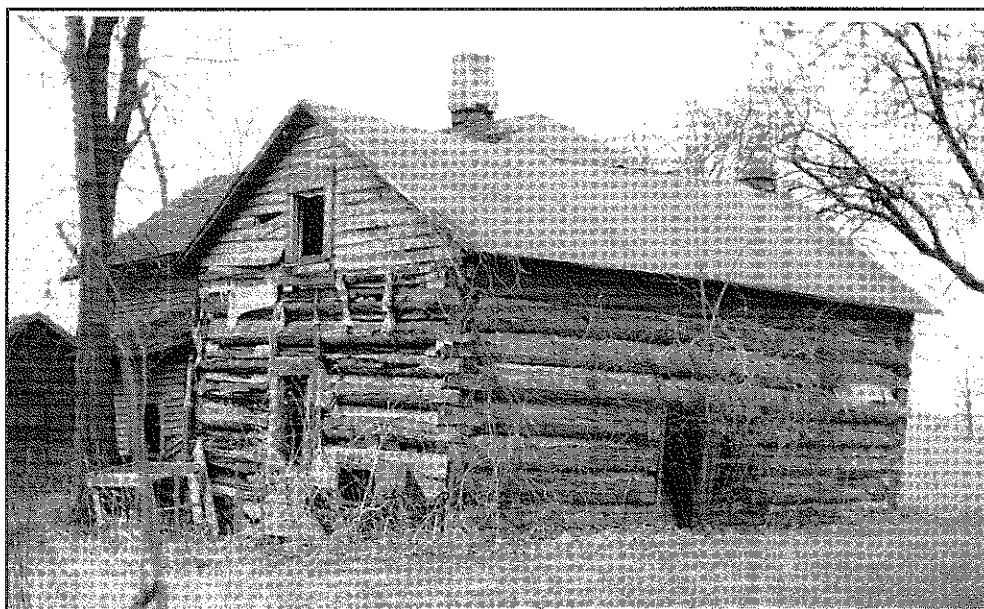


Chapter Nine

THEMATIC SURVEYS



Usher Log House, Ingham County

Thematic survey is the survey of properties relating to a specific property type or historic theme. Thematic surveys of industrial and engineering sites, highway bridges, post offices, and state parks have been carried out at the statewide level, and myriad other property types or themes such as vernacular log buildings, outdoor sculpture, designed historic landscapes, and the automobile industry could be the subjects of statewide thematic surveys. Thematic surveys involving single counties or larger cities are equally feasible. A survey project in Grand Rapids included thematic surveys of city parks, public school buildings, and cemeteries, and a survey of public school buildings in Detroit have been proposed. Thematic surveys could involve important aspects of local history, such as the struggle for Civil Rights in Detroit or Detroit's rich twentieth-century heritage as a center for jazz and other forms of popular music. A survey of sites associated with the history of popular music in Detroit, for example, might seek to identify birth-places and homes of musicians, recording studios, and clubs, ballrooms, and other places where locally and nationally important performers and groups played. The possibilities for thematic surveys are endless.

Thematic surveys differ from other survey types in requiring an initial property-specific research phase to identify the specific properties to be surveyed or to locate the areas likely to produce resources that merit survey. Standard sources of information such as published histories typically used for surveys may not be especially useful in thematic surveys, and research in specialized

sources of information appropriate to the project will be needed. A statewide survey of historic railroad bridges might require a search for engineering and railroad journals and bridge company records and catalogs that might provide information on specific structures, attempts to locate railroad company records, and review of maps to locate likely points for major bridges. Surveys of Civil Rights struggle-related sites or popular music-related sites in Detroit would probably require extensive amounts of oral history interviews. A survey of Finnish farmsteads in the Upper Peninsula would likely require research in old maps and census records to determine where the concentrations of Finnish

settlements were located. Surveyors will need to devise research strategies appropriate for identifying and documenting the resources to be surveyed. Persons with specialized knowledge of the survey's subject matter should be involved in the project beginning at the planning stage.

In carrying out a thematic survey, the general instructions for intensive level survey provided in this manual should be followed. However, a thematic survey must begin with a research phase both to document the theme itself and to identify and document the associated properties. The thematic research will lead to the preparation of a single thematic narrative that includes discussion of the property types associated with it. The survey report's *Project Introduction* (see the **SURVEY REPORT** section of Chapter 7) should define the property types and themes encompassed by the survey project.